

1-1-2003

Post-totalitarian transition in education in countries of Central and Eastern Europe

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Post-totalitarian transition in education in countries of Central and Eastern Europe

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Education

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Ames, Iowa

2003

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INTRODUCTION

A thoroughgoing transformation involves the displacement of the old order by the new one, based upon very different aims and objectives and, inevitably, by application of new- and often previously untested-means to attain them (Tomiak, 2000, p. 145).

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have become an arena of economic, political, and cultural crisis over the past thirteen years. They present in themselves the unique phenomenon of the transformation of a certain system of government into its exact ideological, political and economic opposite. Education has become one of the main targets of change, an undisputed priority, and one of the most important tools of transition. The transition in education started in these countries without experts, with shattered economic systems, and with uncertain political situations. The reforms in education reflect the peoples' state of mind, who wanted change not because of the specific vision of future, but the passionate denial of the past and present.

Because the countries of the region have suffered under the same political order, they have been referred to as a "bloc", or "camp", implying a blended entity. Although "...one of the great gains of the dissolution of the Soviet bloc lies in the fact that differences have become visible and legitimate" (Dahrendorf, 1997, p. 3), not many are aware of the fact. After a decade of being independent, these countries are still being seen by some researchers and commentators, (Goldfarb, 1989), in education as one, following practically identical stages of transition. The terms mentioned above cover a wide variety of peoples, cultures, languages, religions, traditions, and historical experiences, which influence the choices they make every day.

This paper attempts to contribute to a better understanding of the transition of the educational systems in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries. One of the main aims of this paper is to discuss the misconceptions about education in transition in countries of the region. It will attempt to answer one main question: What is the content of the post-totalitarian transition in education in countries of Central and Eastern Europe? By content I mean the stages, duration, means, strategies, and constraints of transition? Is it the same for all “countries in transition” of the region? This paper in itself is a concept analysis, building on past historical events.

It has become more evident in the past years that that western scholars and consultants just coming to work in these countries have difficulties adjusting to the Central-Eastern European context, where the “language” of public policy is different and the discourse varies from country to country. Defining the terms, strategies and ideological foundations of reforms in countries of Central and Eastern Europe may help better understand this unprecedented phenomenon. It can help find better solutions for the problems the countries face. Most importantly, these countries present a great source of observation and valuable information for the whole world.

Every country has at some point or another demanded change and viewed education as a panacea, powerful enough to restructure society. Educational efforts in societies where economical and political conditions are unstable, present an important lesson for the whole world. They prove beyond doubt education’s great dependency on economy, politics and no longer raise it above the material.

The present paper is a project of discovery and a learning tool for me, which will help me differentiate between the forms, that transition in education acquires in countries of the

region and the various meanings the term “reform’ takes. To succeed in this aim, it is essential to define “post-totalitarian transition” and the role of ideology on the past and its influence on the present, which the first two parts of the paper discuss. The third chapter focuses on common misconceptions about the transition of education in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including modes of transition, its stages, principles, ideologies and priorities. The paper concludes with case study of one country’s experience: Poland. It will describe the strategies, principles, and priorities of the transition in education of the country and illustrate the issues discussed in the main part of the paper.

The paper will be based on various sources, including country reports by UNESCO, the World Bank, and the Open Society Institute, theoretical books on the subject of post-totalitarian transition in countries of the region, and journal articles on specific problems of transitions. There is not a large amount of literature available on the subject, due to the ongoing transitions and political and economic uncertainty, which defy the attempts to predict the duration and direction of the reforms.

Any attempt to analyze misconceptions or anything else for that matter, is bound to be subjective, as it reflects opinions about how things were, are and how they should be. Although, in identifying what is considered to be wrong, the influence of my opinions, history and my personal involvement in the events, will have their effect on the subjectivity, whether consciously or unconsciously, they will also bring additional value of genuine past experience and cultural knowledge. However, as this paper presents a learning tool, the different voices of experts will dominate the discussion.

TRANSITION vs. POST-TOTALITARIAN TRANSITION

“Countries in transition” has become a term for countries of Central and Eastern Europe frequently used by scholars and researchers, such as Ralf Dahrendorf. This particular scholar defines countries in transition, “...the post communist countries from Eastern and Central Europe, which after the events of the year 1989 have been changing their social, economic, and political system” (Dahrendorf, 1997, p. 92).

Transition is a universal term, which could mean the macro and micro changes in every country on every level. Every individual is in the constant state of transition, from one age to another, from one location to another, from one occupation to another. Not only individuals are in constant state of transition. Every society at some point in its history has changed its government, political direction, ideologies, mentalities, social structures, educational systems and way of life. Life is nothing but a constant sequence of changes, thus transition is more or less a permanent state of change.

Post-Totalitarian Transition

Therefore, “transition” seems to be a very general and mild term for the purpose of this paper. The differentiation between all countries in transition can be made when analyzing the starting and the destination point of the transition. The starting point of the transition for the countries in question is totalitarianism and the destination is some form of liberal democracy. Because I will discuss the countries of the region passing from totalitarianism to democracy, the term “post-totalitarian transition” will better reflect the complex phenomenon of an intermediate stage between the closed and open society. I call

this a phenomenon because it curiously combines old and new values, old and new mentalities, old and new social relations, educational institutions that prepare people for capitalism and ones that prepare people for the society that no longer exists.

Cesar Birzea, Head of the Education Sciences Institute at Bucharest and a professor of Educational and European policies, defines post-totalitarian transition as a "...historical stage whose duration is impossible to determine at present and which will lead to substantial transformations in every domain: political life, the economy, culture, social structures, international relations, etc" (Birzea, 1994, p. 8).

Why do we need a theory of transition and why do we need such exact terminology? The topic I am dealing with is based on the unprecedented historical fact that had no examples in the past. The difficulties that people face when dealing with materials on the countries of the region rest in discourse. Even the word "reform" has a different meaning in the countries going through change. Reform in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe means a complete reversal of the system, or as Poland's Deputy Minister of Education said at one international conference, the countries are in the impossible situation of reconstituting an egg from an omelette.

Totalitarian Society vs. Open Society

To understand better the term "post-totalitarian" and see clearer the challenges in education that the countries face, it is beneficial to know how a totalitarian society differs from a democratic or open one, or to be more exact not the society but the principles or ideals of one.

In the totalitarian societies of the region, collective interests were presented by one single party, which was infallible and had the right to control individual lives of people. The

only ruling party held the universal truth and all legislative, executive, and judicial powers. All means of production belonged to the State. The freedom of expression was severely limited and the only allowed conception of the world was Marxist ideology, which I will talk about in a separate chapter, later altered by Lenin, and even later by Stalin.

In the democratic or open society, the State is protecting political, economic, and civic freedoms. Private enterprise is a key to economic freedom and stability. Legislative, executive, and judicial powers are separate. Electoral system consists of many different parties with an open and competitive chance to be elected by the people. Freedom of speech is one of the constitutional rights of every individual. Free-market economy regulates production and consumption. The individual is allowed any conception of the world.

As it can be seen, the task the countries faced in the last decade is enormous, as they have to turn their political, social, and economic system into its complete opposite. All of the reforms are interrelated and reform of one presupposes reform of another. Constitutional and political reforms are the ones that happened first whether or not people were ready for such drastic changes. This leads to the question of certain characteristics of this stage as related to peoples' state of mind or the "culture of transition" (Birzea, 1994, p. 19).

Culture of Transition

Although the revolution of 1989 happened almost overnight and seemed unbelievably easy after half a century of one ideology ruling an amazing number of countries and individuals, the weight of those years can still be felt today in peoples' attitudes, coexistence of old and new structures, sometimes absence of sound decisions or alternatives and most importantly the absence of the paternalistic figure with all the answers. The disappearance of certainty and ideals created an ideological vacuum for people and led them into the "state of

anomie". This term was coined by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1897). It is the idea that when people find themselves in rapidly changing social conditions, they lose the social guides to behavior. This leads to a state of normlessness and a lack of understanding of acceptable behaviors. And although the sociologist spoke mainly of economic reasons relating to the move from agrarian to urban settings, the term accurately describes the peoples' state of mind at the time, which still persists in some of the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. Ralf Dahrendorf also speaks of unavoidable disenchantment that "...does not create a very favorable climate for the establishment of lasting democratic institutions" (Dahrendorf, 1997, p.13).

The world that they lived in, as constrained as it was in many senses, was still the only one they knew. The Party ideology was theirs, they had nothing and everything in terms of property. People lived the same life, read the same books and were equal in their economic standing. The disappearance of everything mentioned above, the fall of the iron curtain with its overload of information, losses of jobs and collectivism, made people feel abandoned, depressed, and demoralized.

Birzea (1994) does not include the state of anomie into the culture of transition. According to him, the culture of transition consists of the state of reflection, when people look for new ideals, values, social codes, and new certainties. But, the state of anomie seems like the first step towards reflection, if we take into consideration Hopson and Adams (1976) phases of transition that are: initial shock, underestimation, depression, understanding, habituation, research for solutions, end of transition.

The approach towards the content of the culture of transition lies in the person's attitude towards the fall of the iron curtain. Does it symbolize the end of history or the return to it? In his essay on the revolution of 1989, Sir Ralf Dahrendorf identifies three conditions for a successful transition: a State governed by the rule of law, a market economy, and a civil society. The main problem with these three components, according to the scholar, is re-establishing the rule of law requires only six months, but in fact happened even faster in most countries. For market economy, if there are no unforeseen circumstances, it will take 6 years. And civil society? Dahrendorf gives it sixty years. The real post-totalitarian transition happens with individuals. Without this important factor the other two components will not function properly. The countries emerging from Communism must create in a very short period of time, structures that were built in other countries over a much longer time. The three objectives, outlined by Ralf Dahrendorf, cannot be achieved at the same time. Coming up with new laws is done quicker than actually implementing them in real life, when trying to transform completely shattered economy in some cases. Establishment of civil society is the most difficult of all, as it involves changing peoples' mentalities and systems of belief. This difference of time between the components has a great influence on education, as it has to adapt to the dynamic interaction between the transition in process and its identification of new needs.

In this chapter I have specified the definition of the "post-totalitarian transition" and discussed its main characteristics. I believe the knowledge of the context of the transition will simplify the understanding of the choices and challenges the countries face.

COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY AND EDUCATION

“Propaganda is education and education is propaganda. They are more than confounded: they are identified” (Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World: Mexico-China-Turkey: 1929, 1964, p. 71*)

Marx and Education

In this part of my paper, I discuss the communist ideology in education, as it is one of the strongest legacies of the past, still persisting in some countries of the Central and Eastern Europe, influencing people and some educational reform failures in many ways. I will start by describing the Communist ideology specifically in USSR, as it presents the extreme of it and the birthplace of communist education. Later in the chapter I will comment on the extent to which Communist ideology influenced education in client regime countries, as the impact varied.

A fundamental goal of all Communist regimes, beginning with the one established in Russia in 1917 during the October revolution that has changed the order forever, was to create a new type of human being who would be incapable of less than full loyalty to the Party and its leadership. The new humankind, as Communist theoreticians promised, would not have traces of value systems of the western countries. There would not be a place for selfish individualism, and characteristics defined by the state would not be in competition with religious beliefs or ethnicity. “Socialism will be possible only when the psychology of people is radically changed” (Krupskaya, 1920, p. 100), said Krupskaya, the wife of the most influential leader Vladimir Lenin and a prominent state and public figure, one of the founders

of the Soviet system of public education and an honorary member of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

Before describing the manifestation of the Communist ideology in Soviet education, it is necessary to discuss the premise of this effort, which leads us to Karl Marx. Although, his biggest work, *Das Kapital*, was mostly related to economics, he is seen by people as a political philosopher. Marx remains a great source of debates and interpretations. His ideas came to relate to various sciences and areas of research, not only economics and politics. I see him as a great humanitarian idealist (not in the “idealist philosopher” sense though), whose views were used and altered to an extreme in the Soviet Union. The one popular misunderstanding connected with Marxism that persists among people and gives a bad connotation to the term and ideas, is that Marxism is communism.

Marx did not create a philosophy for governing the society; he created a system of thought which seeks to explain humanity and social relations from a materialist point of view. The main idea Marx put forward was that in order to understand society one had to study the means and relations of production. He stated that material conditions determine our ideas of reality. The capitalist economy, according to Marx’s ideas, is characterized by a small group of property owners who own the means of production. This group is also called the bourgeoisie or capitalist class. Another large group is the working class. Marx saw the working class as the group powerful enough to be organized into an army that would destroy the unfair social order, appropriate the means of production, and create a new society without exploitation and oppression, which Lenin has not achieved.

The insightful idea of Marx about consciousness being determined by existence and not vice versa, leads us to the influence Marxism had on ideas about education. Alan A.

Block in his article *Marxism and Education* says: “ Everything must be understood as based or grounded in the relations of production, which in capitalist society is inevitably unequal because of private ownership...education does not rise above the material world and does not contain universal truth” (Block, 1994, p. 65). Marxist philosophy offered people an alternative view of education as related to society. Everything taught at schools of all countries depends in a big way on the dominant ideas of the ruling class at that particular time, thus the legitimate knowledge is determined by the ruling class’s goals, aims, and strategies. It is a matter of survival of the dominant class, a matter of protecting their own interests, and education presents a perfect tool for creating hegemonic structures. Although a philosopher, Marx was an activist all his life who came to see philosophy as not an interpretation of the world, but a way of changing it. His activism is reflected in his view on education as discussed in Block: “Marx looks at education as the potential agent of change in ways that many contemporary political and educational theorists hardly imagine” (Block, 1994, p. 76).

Principles and Strategies of Communist Education

Thus, Lenin justly made education a priority in the new world after the revolution. Lenin viewed schools as an instrument for preparing a classless society and reeducating the entire rising generation in the spirit of communism. The leader put into the application the idea that Marx expressed in the Communist Manifesto about the need to combine education with productive labor in the schools. The book written by Krupskaya *On Labour-Oriented Education and Instruction* proves the seriousness of the attempt. These are two quotations from the book illustrating the purpose of the reform, to install the ideology in schools and train the feeling of importance of not seeing yourself as an individual, but a part of the group:

"Among the habits that Soviet schools must cultivate in pupils, the most important is that of being a socially active person who is a collectivist" (Krupskaya, 1920, p. 115).

"If we want our country to proceed along the road of cooperation, then we must make the greatest use of opportunities it ideologically overcome the small-proprietor mentality. Textbooks must be thoroughly permeated with the spirit of collectivism. Such books should teach children systematically the habit of approaching each question from the point of view of the interests of the larger whole, so that children could get accustomed to view themselves as parts of a whole" (Krupskaya, 1920, p. 116).

Accomplishments in education were one of the triumphs of communism. At the time of the transition in 1989, adult literacy was generally universal; participation and completion rates for children and youths of both genders were high at all levels of education; teachers came to work; students had textbooks; students performed well in international assessments of mathematics and science; and repetition and dropout rates were low. The fact that the system has succeeded in producing well-qualified people, with the capacity to analyze, deep knowledge of their fields, and the knowledge of at least two foreign languages, have surprised the Western world. What was seen as the "inferior system" managed to reach good results. Ana Maria Sandi, in her article on misconceptions about Eastern European education, talks about the systems functioning well, but "...according to the needs of the totalitarian regime. Their main objective was conformity with party guidelines, which entailed producing people adapted to the needs of the uniform societies" (Sandi, 1992, p. 630). So, the questions one has to answer are: What was the purpose of education? What types of individuals were the systems meant to produce?

Purpose of Education

The main catalysts that produced relatively good results in education were the power of ideology, high value attached to school and consequently strong motivation to attend schools, although the type of information they were allowed was strictly limited to that approved by the Party. With one ideology having such a great power, the communist model of education became quite simple. Cezar Birzea describes it best in his book *Educational Reform and Educational Research in Central-Eastern Europe: The Case of Romania*: “one party-one ideology-one nation-one educational system-one curriculum-one textbook-one man” (Birzea, 1995, p. 18). The curriculum of education had to be completely alike everywhere in the Soviet Union. All textbooks, except those very few ones of each republic’s national language and literature, were in the Russian language. People were trained in the singular model of the builder of Communism. The role of the school was to propagate ideology.

Pedagogy in communist countries became one of the fields of science, which was meant to serve the official ideology of the authoritarian regime, which demeaned individuality in people. The philosophy instituted in Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, etc. was the same as the one introduced in the Soviet Union. Pedagogy and detailed psychological testing were condemned. The importance of the context of social and cultural processes was denied. Research, involving themes about the history and modern trends of pedagogy in Western countries, was prohibited. All the aforementioned were regarded as being contradictory to the determinations of the imperialistic aims of the "great state." School was oriented to the diligent and loyal administrator of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The curriculum of

upbringing was unconditionally ideologised, and was absolutely the same at all of the schools of the Soviet Union.

Teachers in schools were expected to teach students how to defend “their” communist beliefs and Party-mindedness, as it was accepted as an unchanging truth that can never be debated and will be forever valid. Remodeling the psychology and reshaping human relationships became the key role of education. Religion, the great and most powerful rival of the communist education was persecuted in the Soviet Union, though taught secretly in many families. It was defined as an integral part of a “bourgeois” thinking, which had no place in that society. National languages and histories of each of the republics were given very little attention and importance.

There was an intention to equalize the entire school structure as well. A 10-year school was in operation throughout the Soviet Union. Only Lithuania gained the right to have an 11-year secondary school. Polytechnic and industrial teaching was introduced into the secondary school in the effort to relate education to real life.

The principles of education were: equal rights for all to an education, mandatory schooling for all children and teenagers, dependency of all State and public school and care institutions, all levels of education provided free of charge, unified system of education and Communistic upbringing, etc. Communist upbringing was implanted by means of mandatory participation in organizations, like the *oktiabreata* troops for small children, pioneer troops for teenagers, and Communist Youth Organization for students. Teachers were obligated to belong to Communist Party groups and organizations.

As early as toward the end of 1920s schooling was made the major instrument of reshaping the people of the nation. Schools were expected to prepare all pupils to become

fully committed builders of Communism, supporting the political leadership. All teachers had to be politically committed and actively engaged into turning each pupil into a Communist man or woman. Parents had very little say in the education of their children, since they were guided by the party activists whose actions, views and ideas passed through controlled channels of the Party. To my mind, the countries behind the “iron curtain” had the perfect environment for creating whatever human beings they needed, as the central features of the Soviet order predestined the success of the project. I will summarize those features, of which Janusz J. Tomiak (2000) talks at length in his article “The Russian Federation in Transition”:

- effective power concentrated in the hands of the members of Politbureau
- the existence of one and only political party, the Communist Party
- all important positions reserved for a carefully selected group of individuals loyal to the Communist cause
- constantly stressed stand against the bourgeois states
- generous assistance given to fraternal Communist parties and political allies abroad
- centrally planned economic development
- nonentity of individual ownership
- elimination of foreign investment and control of contacts with foreigners
- extensive development of armed forces

This set-up was explicitly very consequential for education, its aims, organization and control. The almost sterile elimination of the outside world ensured the impossibility of foreign ideologies and practices. It also influenced the methods and contents of upbringing, which were obvious in the choice of literature allowed in schools, subjects taught, the

attitudes forced by teachers concerning every text and the hierarchical interaction in schools. Charles L. Glenn summarizes everything said above in the chapter on the model of Communist education: "...the central characteristic that schools sought to develop was a lack of independent judgement and self-direction, a willingness to be guided by the Party in all things" (Glenn, 1995, p. 18).

Glenn summarized in one sentence the source of the main problems hindering the development of the reforms. The ideology of the past is still very much present in people. The people who experienced the oppression of the regime are so used to being seen not as individuals, but as parts of the whole, who are not responsible for making decisions. That is why at present teachers, students and parents cannot realize that they are the ones shaping the future system of education and are not trained to think about educational policies, strategies and curriculum as something they have power over. I consider this to be one of the most difficult impediments in overcoming challenges of the reform: inability of people to think of macro-level problems. Ana Maria Sandi gives another explanation of this: "...there is complete ignorance of the existence and importance of macro-level problems" (Sandi, 1992, p. 636). Because people at lower hierarchical level were not taken into account, when decisions were made, they are not aware of the existence of macro-level problems. Another important point Sandi makes in her article is that people of the regime countries are not even used to articulating their problems, as they were aware that they "...may be deliberately overlooked at other levels" (Sandi, 1992, page 636). These personal characteristics combined with the ideological vacuum without plausible alternatives people were exposed to after the fall of communism, present one of the main difficulties the countries of the region face to different extent.

Client Regimes

In this part of the paper I mostly talked about the country where the ideological imposition was represented in its extreme –USSR. What of other client regimes? Were they subjected to the same rigid ideological pressure? Here I will use several countries to illustrate the difference between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe when faced with ideological imposition. I have chosen these particular countries, because of their earlier attempts to fight oppression.

Poland is one of the few countries that relatively successfully resisted the indoctrination of Communist ideology and the use of schools as primary tools for doing that. The Communist state was established in Poland in 1945. Poland differed in its large private component in agricultural sector and its ability to keep their religion and private religious schools and theological universities. These two factors played a crucial role in Poles not accepting the regime fully and being one of the first countries to try to break from it. “The Solidarity Movement attempts of 1956, 1968 and 1980-1981 had clearly shown that Poland the Central Eastern European country most likely to undermine the unity of the Communist bloc. “Poland was the first one to try to break from the stifling control by the Big Brother and abandon the ideology which the nation saw as an unwanted imposition from the outside” (Tomiak, 2000, pp. 132-133).

Romania was heavily influenced by the Soviet ideology. Religious education was absent in schools and compulsory lessons in the politics and economics of capitalism and socialism ensured that every student was well learned in communist ideology. However, Nicolae Ceausescu limited the Soviet influence whenever possible. This leader started to consolidate Romania’s independence from the Soviet Union as early as 1965, when he turned

to Western countries. 1965 was the year when the leader of Romania broke the political and economic relations with the Soviet Union. Russian was not an obligatory subject in schools. Romania became one of the few countries of Eastern and Central Europe not to promote the Soviet language as the primary foreign language in schools.

Hungary is a great example of the country where the reform and attempts at decentralization started as early as 1960s. Still, the Soviet ideology had its influence on education in Hungary. Russian-language study was compulsory from elementary school. Many Soviet professors taught at Hungarian universities, many textbooks were adaptations of the work of Soviet authors, and Russian-language clubs were established. Marxist-Leninist ideology was compulsory in universities of the country. However Hungary had the advantage of having few church institutions with the right to train their clergy. Students also had the opportunity to study in other neighboring countries, which made Hungary's borders more open and the information access was easier and less controlled. Katalin Kovacs (2000) in his article "Transitions in Hungary" talks of the first official Educational Act that launched the educational reform being produced in 1985. The author also mentions that "...the experimentation with alternative curricula started before the change of the regime" (Kovacs, 2000, p. 78). These few examples discussed above hopefully illustrate the diverse extent to which Soviet ideology affected the countries of the region.

The history of education in former Soviet Union is unique and formidable, as at no other time in history education played such an important role and moved so single-mindedly towards only one purpose. The intensity and strength of this movement spread to the absolute monopoly of the means of information and the formation of new values of people.

I consider all the information given above on the education in Soviet Union to be crucial in understanding difficulties and real possibilities of the current reform in countries of Eastern Europe, since "...both in its uncompromising hostility toward religion and its ambivalent treatment of national and ethnic distinctions within the framework of "proletarian internationalism," the Soviet school was the model that client regimes followed" (Glenn, 1995, p. 58).

MODES OF TRANSITION

The misconception of the aforementioned analysts, who discuss the countries of the region as a homogeneous union, leads us to one of the most important arguments for the countries' diversity in transition: forms and starting points of the transitions. I consider this to be crucial in understanding various outcomes of the transitions.

The misconception emerged due to the half a century's history of communist oppression over these countries, made the various peoples and cultures inhabiting them practically invisible and unimportant. Sir Ralf Dahrendorf in his lecture given at Birbeck College, at the University of London in 1990 said that: "...the countries of East, Central and Southeastern Europe, let alone those within the old Soviet Union, are all different...one of the gains of the dissolution of the Soviet bloc lies is the fact that such differences have become visible and legitimate" (Dahrendorf, 1997, page 3). In the previous part I have focused on the various degree of influence that the Soviet ideology had on different countries of Eastern and Central Europe. That and the countries' modes of transition appear to be one of the most important factors, which differentiate between the countries' various paths to democracy and liberal education in the open society.

The latter factor is, as Cezar Birzea (Birzea, 1994, p. 9) states in his discussion about transition, has to do with the "starting point" or "initial state." Although Birzea generalizes the starting point as totalitarianism, which was common to all the countries under discussion, the question is: Did the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have the same starting point and did they start the transition at the same time? The answer to this question explains the different outcomes of the educational reforms in countries of the region and the fact that they are now at very different levels of development.

Revolution vs. Refolution

Before discussing the most plausible theory of transition from dictatorship to democracy, I would like to focus on the events of 1989. Was the drama of this year significant enough for all countries of the region? Was the year of 1989 the first turning point for educational systems of all the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe?

The differences in countries' experiences rest even in how they see the year of 1989. For some countries, the year was just another step in what they have been doing for years, in other words moving away from the ideological oppression on all levels. For others it was a true awakening, they were unprepared for. The following distinctions between some of the terms given by some analysts, illustrate the diversity of the starting points and their impact on education.

Analysts called it a revolution (Dahrendorf, Goldfarb), although Dahrendorf seemed to agree to some extent with Timothy Garton Ash, who coined a special term for the events of 1989 for some of the countries (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia): **refolution**. The explanation for this being that the changes were deep and profound, but "...took the form of drastic reforms from above which corresponded to and absorbed pressure from below" (Dahrendorf, 1991, p. 87), again only for several of the countries of the region.

Karl and Schmitter's Modes of Transition

Karl and Schmitter in their article "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern Europe and Eastern Europe" attempted to compare the Central-Eastern European transition by using the analogies of the Southern Europe and Latin America and their transition from the dictatorship to democracy. This comparison takes into account only political aspects of these systems, without considering the historical context, the great diversity of the countries

of the former communist regime, the patterns of totalitarian oppression. However, these researchers still came up with interesting results, which explore the commonalties between the countries and illustrate the previously stated point about the events of 1989 not being “real revolution” for some countries of the region, according to Dahrendorf vision of revolution, which I find reasonable:

Karl and Schmitter focused on four modes of transition from dictatorship to democracy:

1. The pact-elites reach the compromise.
2. Imposition-elites establish a new political system using force.
3. Reform-the following of the bottom-up initiation.
4. Revolution-population imposes change by violence.

Applying these four modes to the historical events in Southern, Eastern and Central Europe and Latin America, Karl and Schmitter came up with following conclusions if we take into account only the countries in the focus of this paper:

1. The former **USSR** and **Bulgaria** followed the mode of transition with the democracy being imposed from above.
2. **Poland**, former **Czechoslovakia**, former **Yugoslavia** followed the mode of transition through bottom-up reforms.
3. **Hungary**, according to Karl and Schmitter, followed the mode of transition by both pact and imposition.
4. **Romania** came the closest to having a real revolution and followed the mode of transition by both revolution and imposition.

Stages of Transition

The year of 1989 remains historically crucial, as that year was the time when the revolutions and “refolutions” broke out in Central and Eastern Europe, but in several countries they were preceded by events that prepared people for them. In some countries, like Hungary and Poland, they started happening as early as 1960s and 1970s and in others they came with no warning.

Cezar Birzea (Birzea, 1994, pp.33-34) identified three pre-1989 stages: the post-Stalinist phase, the post-totalitarian stage, and the post-communist phase. Birzea notes that some countries went directly from Stalinism to post-communist phase (Albania) and some went from pure dictatorship to multi-party democracy (Romania). This division illustrates the heterogeneity and wide variety of styles of transition. The year of 1989 remains to be a historical date preceded by stages which prepared a way for it. In the countries of the region, the fall of Communism happened in various manners and at different times. This diversity is due to variety of historical, cultural and other reasons and the content of even common stages is different among the countries of the region.

How did these pre-1989 stages were reflected in education? The countries which attempted liberalization earlier than 1989, made or tried to make positive changes in educational systems at the same time.

In **Poland**, the Solidarity movement, all along its attempts in 1956, 1968, and 1980-1981, made the transmission of the traditional Polish values one of the priorities of the movement. From the early 80s and during the following years the Solidarity movement tried “...to ensure that patriotism, devotion to the national cause, respect for the Catholic faith and

intimate familiarity with Polish history and literature constituted indispensable elements in the education and upbringing of the younger generation” (Tomiak, 2000, pp. 137-138).

In the **Russian Federation**, the educational transformation has proceeded along the stages of the political transformation and not earlier than 1989, as the whole educational system had to be altered without having much to build on and clear direction.

Hungary, the pioneer among the countries of the region to open the western borders and start its transition, started the decentralization of its educational system as early as 1985 with the Educational Act, which promoted pluralism in administration, curriculum, and in ideology. (Kovacs, pp. 78-79).

Bulgaria had been researching the possibilities of changing the educational system from 1986, but not in terms of ideological or decentralization matters. The options of elective courses and inclusion of religion and Turkish language were discussed, but not approved or made a reality.

The Czech and Slovak Republics suffered through a very harsh ideological oppression in the educational system, very much like in the Soviet Union. The republics lived through a short period of an attempted liberalization in 1968, when the churches were given control of religious instruction, before this attempt was suspended by the Soviet Union.

In this part of the paper I attempted to outline the different modes of transition in the countries of the region, the state of the countries in 1989, and their attempts at the educational reforms before that year. The difference between the countries is obvious and their educational efforts are closely linked to their relative political and ideological freedom. In some countries the attempts at reform happened much earlier and were either partly accepted or suppressed, in others they happened overnight, with people being unprepared and

uninvolved for the most part, which accounts for some features of Durkheim's "anomie" discussed before. Thus, the initial state of the country, the way the revolution happened (top-down, or bottom-up), and the people's attitudes and expectations play an important role in the countries' development, strategies and ideological foundations upon which they are building the reforms of their educational systems. The aforementioned factors also account for the observed relative lack of certain challenges in reforming educational systems in some countries with bottom-up initiated transitions. The countries with history of opposition and attempts at hidden curriculum, due to lesser ideological opposition, have fewer challenges to overcome.

PRINCIPLES, PRIORITIES, AND IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

In previous parts of this paper, I have discussed the factors that make each country's transition unique and different. But, are there common patterns that unite the countries in their diversity? How did the ideological changes in the countries of the region effect educational policies? In this part I concentrate on principles, priorities, and ideological foundations that guide the countries' policy makers in education. This part is focused around different, but also common challenges that countries in post-totalitarian transition have to overcome.

There are two features that make this transition in education in some of the countries of the region, mostly those which have experienced a top-down initiated transition, unique: (1) the combination of the three components of the transition that are challenging themselves: move from a totalitarian system, overcoming economic crisis, modernization (meaning development of new ideas, principles, and structures), and (2) the fast speed of structural changes and instability of those. The changes happening simultaneously in health, welfare, public administration, education, and in some cases the state languages, books, histories, make the transition process in these countries extremely traumatic for people, who have difficulty adapting to such rapid and dramatic change.

Stages and Transition Factors

Researchers (Glenn, 1995; Rado, 2001; Tomiak, 2000) define some specific common stages through which some of the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe go through in their post-totalitarian transition. As I have argued before, due to various degrees of ideological oppression and modes of transition, the countries do not follow exactly the same patterns, thus the following is the researchers' view of the most "common" stages. However,

I agree that the following stages are common to most of the countries of the former Soviet Union. Cezar Birzea's identification of the stages does not contradict the views of aforementioned researchers but is more detailed:

1. Political rupture
2. The break-up of the old system
3. Replacement of the old structures
4. Stabilization of the new system
5. Ensuring of its self-regulating capability (Birzea, 1994, p. 34).

The transition in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe is happening on several levels or rather a combination of several components: move to a democratic system (all of the countries), overcoming the economical crisis (to a different degree in each country, as Poland had relatively mild consequences of such), and re-definition of values (to a different degree, as some countries outside of the Soviet Union, managed to keep their traditional values), which seem to be one of the main uncertainties after the collapse of communism.

How do these presumably common social and political stages relate to the transition in education systems of the countries of the region? The above discussed factors, generated by analysts are important as they, as I see them, coincide with the development of new or reforms of old education systems of the countries. An education system has to follow the same stages of change, starting with ideological change and decentralization of the system. In some countries of the region the ideological change in education happens with freedom of speech, rewritten history, and development of religious education. Unfortunately in others, this change has to happen on a deeper level and take longer time, as the degrees of

ideological infiltration differed from country to country. Re-definition of the role of the states along with decentralization of schools is another important challenge common to most of the countries' education systems. I consider that the following two misconceptions delay the decentralization of the schools. The one is that after years of functioning on the command, educational systems of some countries of the region are still static and do not allow for external intrusion. This also leads us to the conviction of people that budgetary infusion can solve everything and is the main necessity, which is not untrue to an extent. However, I consider the lack of democratic experience to be the main impediment towards decentralized system of education in the countries of the region. When the argument of creating changes from which all of the society would benefit from the center arise, people are not always ready to ask: Why should the center know better which changes to advance? Ana Maria Sandi (Sandi, 1992, p. 634) considers democratic benefits of participation to be missing even in countries with fairly advanced educational systems such as Romania, although the same scholar mentions some advancement in decentralizing in such countries as Poland and Hungary. Thus, re-definition and revival of values and decentralization of education systems are the most important challenges the countries' education structures face. The following are some other challenges, seen as common to all countries of the region, by several analysts.

Peter Rado in his book *Transition in Education* (2001, p.11) mentions such factors as modernization, adjustment to global changes, and re-definition of the role of the states, which I consider to be common challenges most countries of the region face. Janusz J. Tomiak (2000, p. 147) brings up several more factors having to do with the future transformation: formulation of the alternatives visions of future and confrontation of the conflicting forms of

the envisaged transformation, the latter gone to an extreme in nationalistic movements in some countries of the region.

Cezar Birzea, identifies the first typical stage in the process of transition in education in the region. It is what he describes as *rectification stage* (1994, p. 39). This means the abolishment of the ideological monopoly and strict control over institutions and flow of information. I presume that the stage is described as a typical one because of its overwhelming presence in the education systems of the countries during transition, although the degree of its presence varied greatly. For example in Romania the control over the flow of information was weakened significantly during the reign of Nicolae Ceausescu, when he pursued foreign policy that was striving to be independent of that of Moscow.

The second stage is described by Peter Rado and is defined as the period of *white papers* and *reform plans* (2001, p.25), which is characterized by the school structure being in the focus of debates. One can safely assume that this stage is common to all countries, whether in the middle of major reversal of the system or not. Very few countries of the region have reached the third stage, which is understandably, the actual implementation of the reforms.

Definition of the common stages by experts has as its aim to find common solutions with the existence of common stages. To my mind, the cultural and historical diversity of the region will not allow for common solutions, even though some stages through which the countries go through may be similar. Also, the destination points of the countries' educational systems are various and they along with the past experience determine the road the reforms take. The economical situation and stability defines the success and pace of the

reforms in a great way, as for example, ideological change in the curriculum requires teaching materials change, teacher re-training, etc. Nevertheless, the views of the aforementioned experts are important in a way that by trying to define the common stages, they simultaneously illustrate the uniqueness of the post-totalitarian transition in education.

Visions and Debates

The changes in 1989 posed a lot of problems before people, who were unprepared for the most part to deal with the change and had no clear vision of the future. Education was in the center of the contradictory debates about the way each country would take. There were thoughts and suggestion debated in each country about policy borrowing from the countries with relatively successful academic systems. A multitude of political parties and organizations appeared in countries where people were given the chance of expressing their own beliefs and ideas publicly for the first time, and each group had its own perception of which road to take, and which country's system to take as a model, not unlike the situation in Western countries.

However, it is hard to believe that such reforms can be appropriate in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe. When educational system needs change, the other countries of the world deal with it as a separate problem. Traditionally, educational reforms then, aim at the change in a definite structure, curriculum, teaching principles, technologies, etc. Reforms in former communist countries are concerned with the very foundations, basic values and aims of the former system. "They must attempt to change mentalities and modes of thought. Reforms of an evolutionary type should naturally accompany these processes, as they are specific to any developing system" (Sandi, 1992, p. 631).

Given the great legacy of having good educational outcomes, the educational systems of transition countries would seem to have few problems, relative to other parts of the world, since the problems of gender inequities and low participation were not present for the most part. Adult literacy rate was over 96%, according to World Bank statistics (The World Bank Report, 2000, p. 2). However, the regulations of the system that resulted in such great outcomes with the former requirements of the communist influence in education have changed. Now, the educational systems of the countries have to prepare people for an entirely different world, world of market economies and uncertainty of what that specifically is and what skills are needed.

Policy makers agree on the necessity of the move from the command driven to a demand driven system in education. Peter Rado's description (2001, p. 24) of the differences between these systems can be summarized as follows: The demand driven system is characterized by: learning in the center of pedagogy, focus on learning outcomes, focus on cost effectiveness, decentralization of the system, free access to information, and the most important one being policy determined by analysis. Being in contrast with the command driven system, which puts teaching in the center of the learning process, focuses on control of the resources, limits and restricts information, and is centralized and controlled. Policy in a command driven system is distinguished by policy determined by the dominant and single permitted ideology. Rado's description seems limited to an extent, an attempt of dividing these characteristics into black and white. The idea of policies in a demand driven systems being influenced solely by analysis of outcomes and process of education, is a utopist one. One can argue that a lot of features of a command driven system are present in the education of countries with demand driven systems. The difference rests in level of perceptibility of

permitted ideologies regulating the curriculum, policies, and goals. In the United States there is hegemonic ideology, while in the former Soviet Union these ideologies were openly forced upon the people. The only truly attainable goal for policy makers is to make sure that the discourse governing the educational policies is not left uncontested.

Thus, for the purposes of this paper, it is better to discuss the principal characteristics of the liberal education, as the ideal, which the countries of the region attempt to attain. Liberal education is characterized by seeing education as a universal human right and promotes equality of opportunity. There is no single truth and every person has a right to his/her cultural, religious, political, ideological beliefs. Educational process and personal development is in the center of education, not work and production. This learning process is enhanced by individual experience.

Challenges and Priorities

This ideal view of the education system, so radically different from the communist type education poses a lot of challenges for the countries. The primary one is filling the ideological vacuum created by the fall of communism. The countries with bottom-up transition process have fewer dilemmas with that, since they have a clearer vision of the future of their education systems, which generally means returning to traditions. For others, mostly former Soviet Union countries after the fall of the ideology that ruled these countries for several decades there had to be created other conceptions of the world. The whole idea of constructing a human to be a submissive and brainwashed instrument in the fight for communism is no longer valid. The world outside the schools and universities, which underwent dramatic political and economic changes, demands an independent human being, capable of critical thinking, with very specific skills demanded by employers.

The discussion of stages of the post-totalitarian transition and the principles of the liberal education as the model of the education of the future, leads to the discussion of some common and unlike priorities and strategies of the countries of the region. The following is a summary of the priorities policy makers, analysts and researchers of the Eastern and Central Europe identify as crucial to the transition. These illustrate how the change affected and affects schools and universities of the countries of the region. Some countries successfully implemented most of these measures, while others are still struggling with the most basic principles education systems should be based on.

The following three types of measures summarized below, are generated by three sources: Birzea's work, the analysts of OECD, and The World Bank. They identify three types of measures in the current legislation on education: rectification, modernization, and restructuring.

Rectification measures, some of which were discussed above, according to Birzea (1994, pp. 71-72), involve elimination of the communist ideology, replacement of communist education with liberal education, the removal of people compromised by close connection with old system, renewal of history, social science and civic textbooks. These types of rectification measures were and are present in all post communist countries, although to a different degree. Two other rectification measures, described by the same scholar are limited only to several countries of the region, such as abolishment of polytechnic education (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Baltic States), and intensification of the study of the national language (Baltic States, Croatia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova), although the two latter countries are changing their course of action now, with the growing influence from Russia.

Modernization measures and strategies, which Birzea defines as improving the component of specific component of the education system, (1994, p. 72) are also addressed by programs working in the countries of the region. The Thematic Review of National Policies for Education of 2002, the project of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, although acknowledging the diversity of the challenges the countries of the region face, lists some common features of the policy change: developing a comprehensive strategy for the entire education system, renewal of the curriculum, improving the professional qualifications of teachers, developing policy for social and educational protection of children, developing programs for children with special need. (OECD Thematic Review, 2002, pp. 14-15).

Birzea adds to this list other priorities, which can be summarized as follows, mentioning that each of them is country specific and many of them may be absent in some countries, while being top priorities in others: reviewing teaching plans, introducing new subjects, setting minimum standards, introducing religious education in schools, changing to more active teaching methods, making special provisions for exceptionally gifted and talented children, introduction to multiculturalism, reducing the number of pupils per class, reducing weekly teaching loads, improving system of selection, evaluation and examination, increasing the study of foreign languages, adapting teacher training programs, abandoning the single textbook, updating the list of specialties in vocational training, recognizing the right to teaching mother tongue for ethnic minorities, reevaluating the relationship between basic knowledge and specialized knowledge, improving recruitment procedures in higher education, improving the quality of higher education by content and method change, encouraging scientific research.

The World Bank report summarizes the **restructuring priorities**, which Birzea defines as “... changing the organization and functioning of the education system in accordance with new policies...” (1994, p. 75), as follows (The World Bank Report, 2000, pp. 2-3): alignment, fairness, financing, efficiency, governance, management, and accountability. Thus, the above-mentioned challenges define the World Bank’s Goals for Education Eastern and Central Europe region development objectives:

- *Realign education systems with market economies and open societies.

- *Combat poverty by increasing educational fairness.

- *Finance for sustainability, quality, and fairness.

- *Spend resources more efficiently.

- *Reinvent the sector’s governance, management, and accountability (The World Bank Report, 2000, pp. 6-7). Although generalizing the problems the countries of the region face, the World Bank Report of 2000, pinpoints one of the main difficulties that they have to overcome-lack of accountability.

Accountability was never an issue in the CEE countries before the transition. The taxpayers were never presented with reports on how the money was spent. Nowadays the publicly financed schools have to be accountable to taxpayers for the costs and quality of the education. Unfortunately, most countries according to the World Bank Report (2001): “...cannot measure service delivery and almost none make what information they do have widely available to public”. Still seeing education as separate from the political, social and economic forces, educators in some CEE countries have to realize the enormous effect external forces have on educational purposes and achievements.

Birzea (1994, p. 76) also considers abolishment of the State monopoly over education, and decentralizing the management and administration of education to be the main priorities of the restructuring measures in all post communist countries. The author adds to the list of the priorities defined by the World Bank, by detailing the policies aimed at increasing the educational fairness adopted in only some countries of the region: development of education in rural and less-favored areas, developing remedial education for adults, restructuring vocational and technical secondary education, democratizing access to higher education improving links between secondary and higher education. (Birzea, 1994, pp. 75-78).

There is a fine line between rectification, modernization and restructuring priorities. There is also a time gap between the legal, official introduction of a policy during the reform and the actual implementation of it, especially in the countries of the region. Pierre Laderriere in his *Strategies of Educational Reform: From Concept to Realization* calls this “political time” and “maturing time”(Laderriere, p. 19). The priorities listed above vary from country to country and only a detailed case study can identify the ones specific to each of the countries. However, there are some common priorities listed above that come from the eagerness of the policy makers to decentralize education, abolish the ideology of the past, and restructure the education system according to the new world.

Leading Ideologies

Effective transformation of an educational system requires a clear choice of one preferred option, voted for by a majority, so that the action could be taken. The opening of the borders and the disappearance of the iron curtain gave way to the tremendous flow of

information and the creation of one mainstream philosophy that the majority could agree upon is problematic.

There are those who support the ideas of borrowing solutions from the West. Others seeing the problems the Western educational system are confronted with, argue for the return to traditions. David Coulby in his article "Education in Times of Transition: Eastern Europe with Particular Reference to the Baltic States", talks of "*a renewed interest in the West and nationalism*" (2000, p. 9), as two main directions the transition in the countries of the region is aimed at. In fact, there are several competing approaches to educational change. There are various interpretations and names of the approaches. Janusz Tomiak talks of liberal-democratic vision, nationalistic vision, and neo-communist vision (2000, p. 147-156) in connection with former Soviet Union states. Some works discuss only the western and nationalistic models. Peter Rado (2001) describes in his book egalitarian (the same for all), elitist (quality for all who deserve it), free market (quality for those who can afford it), and democratic (quality for all) approaches.

Very few people want to return to the traditions of communism in education, as now they realize the close relationship of that with value systems and beliefs. With their search for the ideological foundations for the educational systems, the people of Central and Eastern Europe are looking for their identities, that is why along with the turn to capitalism, other ideologies such as nationalism, religious values, family and public morality are taking place among major directives. "Archaic ideologies which were current at the beginning of the century are already rushing in to fill the space abandoned by all-powerful Marxism. Anti-capitalist and anti-western ideologies are also racing towards this wilderness" (Birzea, 1994, p. 41). One can combine the aforementioned approaches into four major ideologies

influencing of the educational policies in the countries: liberalism, nationalism, Christian democracy and social democracy. The pedagogical manifestations of these ideologies are:

- a. Progressivism – ideas should be tested by experimentation and learning is rooted in questions developed by the learner.
- b. Perennialism – principles of knowledge are enduring, values time honored idea, great works of the past and present thinkers, and the ability to reason.
- c. Essentialism – there is a core of information and skills that every educated person in a given culture must have. Schools should be organized to transmit this core effectively, focusing on cultural heritage and good citizenship.
- d. Reconstructionism – schools should teach to control institutions and to be organized according to democratic ideals. Schools are vehicles for social change.

Birzea (1994, pp. 43-55) in his country analysis identified the following leading ideologies for the following countries:

Poland - Neo-liberalism and Christian democracy

Hungary – Liberalism, Neo-traditionalism and Christian democracy

Czech Republic – Neo-conservatism

Slovak Republic – Nationalism

Romania – Social democracy

Bulgaria – Social democracy and neo-traditionalism

Slovenia – Neo-Liberalism

Estonia – Nationalism and liberalism

Latvia – Christian-democracy and nationalism

Russia – Liberalism

Ukraine – nationalism and neo-traditionalism

Belarus – nationalism and neo-traditionalism

Moldova – nationalism.

This analysis leads to the following conclusion. Most of the countries are using one or another western ideology in creating their educational policies. Nationalism is also an influential ideology, especially in the former republics of the Soviet Union, which after years of losing their identity, want to build the new system on their own traditions, histories and languages. The newly discovered freedom of religion and family values, also play an important role in the new policies.

Unfortunately, the decisions on the ideology choice did not come easy for many countries of the region and still are the source of ardent debates and the result of nationalistic chauvinism and weight of the past ideology. The clear decisions on the chosen direction of the educational systems are delayed by unclear political situation in some countries. The example of this can be Moldova. The country has been on the road to a democratic state for several years, following the nationalistic ideology and recognizing return to traditions and Romanian language. Now, with the Communist Party in charge again and renewed influence from Russia, the road that the reform in education has to take is once again unclear and a source of public protests.

Peter Rado mentions the “special situation” (2001, p. 13) of countries of Central and Eastern Europe going through post-totalitarian transition. What he intends to say is that policies that aim at deep changes in public sectors of the countries in focus will undoubtedly meet attempt of rejection of such reforms, mostly influenced by the simple ideology and conservatism still leaving its trace on the way people see change in the countries formerly

ruled by one single power. Richard Pachocinski in his article *Educational Development in Central and Eastern Europe* talks of the necessity of a spiritual revival of post-communist societies on the basis of religion and universal values (Pachocinski, 1997). This illustrates that even the understandings of people within one region, who experienced the same historical changes, may have very different opinions on what reforms should happen and their opinions would be heavily influenced by their diverse ideological agendas (ex. nationalistic movements; debates over state languages and their dominance in educational institutions).

Slavko Gaber in his article “The Decade of Change” presented on the conference *Drafting New Curricula* in Bohinji, Slovenia (April, 2002), says: “Numerous reforms produce opposition to change, but on the other hand it is true that in a number of cases changes took place because it was the right time for them.” Thus, the question that the reformers should answer is if the minds of people are ready for dramatic changes.

After almost a decade of the beginning of transition the problems and priorities of these countries differ in degree as some of them succeeded in establishing some political stability and the rule of law, while others did not. To finish this overview of the challenges and priorities, it is important to discuss some of the results of the reforms and the present situation of the education system of a few countries.

Early Results

The research being done in the countries of the region by foreign programs proves to be difficult, because of lack of data. Quantitative, comparative studies are close to impossible, especially in the regions torn by war. After careful analysis of several programs focused on data gathering, I came to the conclusion that the OECD project Thematic Review

of National Policies for Education: Regional Overview and The World Bank Report *Hidden Challenges to Education Systems in Transition Economies*, presented the most effort and the most accurate information, as the final version was compiled by country experts and attempted to cover all areas of reforms. Unfortunately the obtained information is not complete, for the reasons of transitional state of the countries, huge migrations, destroyed documents and lack of institutional network. The following results provided by the programs are incomplete since they focus on countries with the tragedies and drastic changes, but are sufficient in order to illustrate the challenges discussed before and the present situation.

The General Data. OECD report showed big changes in the population, due to wars, ethnic conflicts, economic situation. Mixed ethnic composition presented major difficulties for education, but there is no definite data on that, as for example in Bulgaria the new Statistical Law does not allow data gathering according to ethnic origin. The countries of this region also encountered falling birth rate. The World Bank report also shows big changes in population, except the Asian republics where population actually grew.

The Participation in Education. OECD report discusses the almost unchanged structure of the educational systems in the countries of South Eastern Europe, except Romania and Moldova, which practice 9 years of compulsory schooling, whereas in other countries it still remains 8 years. The average number of years of schooling is low and mostly does not exceed 8 years, but this data is incomplete as several countries reported that this data could not be gathered. Participation in pre-school education is low, especially in Croatia and Albania (35%) and Kosovo (3%), which can be explained by the governments not longer financing the pre-school education, with the costs for it being parents' responsibility nowadays. In basic and higher education all countries reported high participation. Most of the

countries of the South Eastern Europe reported high participation in vocational education, except Albania and Moldova, which can be explained by high unemployment rate in specific professions. The World Bank Report shows the considerably lessened participation in education the republics of former Soviet Union and growing participation in education in Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic. Data for Slovenia was not available.

Equality. According to the reports, differences in learning opportunities are emerging in the new world where the families' incomes started to differ greatly. Typically children enrolled in schools in larger cities have access to better education and generally have higher achievement in scores, than those living in rural areas, where shortage of teachers and books and their own economic situation have an impact on their acquisition of knowledge. Another aspect of inequality is the absence of the social aspect of school for poor children, who cannot afford the participation in extra curricula activities and even pay for school meals prices for which tend to rise rapidly.

The OECD project reported the equal proportion of female and male students in general, which is the legacy of the communist past. However, the report makes assumptions about women in rural parts and Roma children being marginalized and having unequal opportunity to learn. Although the report does not present any numbers on the topic, the current economic situation, past stereotypes and some aspects of Roma culture suggest that these assumptions are most probably true.

The World Bank report mentions equality challenges in countries of the region with multiple ethnic groups such as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The report also showed the tendency of family income and urban residence to predict enrollment rates. For example in Romania "...a national assessment of the educational

achievements of grade 4 students showed that the strongest influence on students' performance was the location of the school (rural versus urban)" (The World Bank Report, 2000, p. 32).

The Number of Institutions. The projects reported no evidence of radical closing of institutions, although some countries of the region experienced problems with enrolment in rural parts and some types of institutions. In the countries of the region the number of private kindergartens and schools is still low and if they do exist they are not supported by the national budget at all. The majority of private institutions are kindergartens (124 in Croatia, 70 in Romania, 41 in Moldova, 28 in Albania, 18 in Bulgaria) and primary schools (56 in Bulgaria, 30 in Romania, 26 in Croatia, 21 in Moldova, and 18 in Albania). The system of adult education ceased to exist in the countries of the region, although there is a desperate need for retraining and professional development programs.

Curriculum. Curriculum change is present, but is very insufficient, as is teacher training. Only in some countries, according to the report, new curricula have been approved and implemented, but there is no accurate data available on this topic. The need for teaching minority languages and in minority languages is crucial, although is impeded in some countries of the region by financial constraints. The same is also said in both reports about new history books. The World Bank Report noted a large number of subjects in schools and universities in the countries of the region, each being addressed only one or two times a week, recommending reducing the number of subjects, while enhancing the depth of students' learning.

Administration. Administration of the educational institutions is disregarded in the countries of the region, according to the reports. There is no training for school principals

and teachers, thus the ratio of under or unqualified teachers, is very high, for example: Moldova 46% and Romania 13% in higher education and 33% in non-university higher education institutions. Taking into account the economic situation of the countries, educational institutions experience severe problems with facilities and equipment. The situation is most problematic in Kosovo, the region affected by war. Country reports show that there is lack of data on facilities and equipment; therefore the OECD report and The World Bank Report have not presented any numbers in this area.

Costs and Financing. Costs and financing have been the most difficult part of the study for the researchers compiling the documents. This type of data proved to be missing for the most part. Pavel Zgaga in his final version of the OECD report named the following reasons for it: transitional nature of the societies, frequent changes in legislation, inflation, and absence of monitoring. In Kosovo, for example, during the years of the research, 2000 and 2001, there existed no country budget and international resources financed education. However, the report suggests some general characteristics. The average of public financing of education is 3-4% GDP. Most of the resources are paid to teachers as salaries, for obvious reasons. The World Bank Report also names the macroeconomic decline as the primary factor that reduced the funds available for education. Although, the report names Slovenia, Poland, Czech republic, Romania, Estonia, and Lithuania as countries rapidly recovering from it, the situation in other countries of the region is much worse, in terms of teacher salaries, didactic materials, that no longer are published by the government, etc.

As it can be seen from these studies, several countries of the region are still struggling with the most basic of needs and there do exist common problems, although the solutions to each are and should be country specific.

Educational quality cannot be constant under all conditions. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are good example of an educational system being perfectly fitted with planned economies, and require immediate and dramatic changes with the open market economies and open political systems. War and ethnic conflicts presented huge difficulties for educational systems of some countries and are among the main priorities in the reforms. Economic situation is another huge impediment toward effective change, as there can be no positive change in the education systems where around 90% of the budget goes to pay teacher salaries, the sum, which proves to be insufficient even for that purpose.

The decline in education in some countries of the region, especially countries of the former Soviet Union, having a multitude of reasons, is obvious, although some countries have already passed the second stage of the reform. Peter Rado puts forward the idea that reaching the third stage does not necessarily mean higher quality and better learning outcomes. "...sudden and frequent changes of regulation, content or financing, the questioned legitimacy of traditional values, the fast transformation of policy expectations of governments and the points of orientation of teachers and schools in general, very often result in temporary decline of quality in education" (Rado, 2001, p. 25). The author calls it *reform implementation dip*, the unavoidable characteristic of educational reform.

This chapter's purpose was to focus on the differences in priorities, challenges, and principles underlying the reforms in the countries of the region. Among those, there were some common challenges, which united these countries in their diversity. Some characteristics of the former regime still left the countries of Central and Eastern Europe with several shared priorities. I found the link between the political and economic stages the countries go through and their connection to the reforms in educational systems of the

countries fascinating, as the reform in education has to go through the same phases. The visions and ideological foundations of the countries' educational systems were an important part in my argument about the impossibility of copying elements of Western reforms in education in the countries of the region. This was illustrated further by measures the countries have to implement and some results, which was important in its focus on the uniqueness and region specific problems. Since the countries vary in their background, accomplished reforms, and stages of evolution, I focused on common as well as different challenges and priorities, giving no country specifications, realizing that only a country case study can provide a detailed analysis of those. In a closer look at one specific country it would be more beneficial to concentrate on strategies, priorities, and preliminary results of the reform in education.

POLAND

This following part of the paper will continue my study of educational reforms in transition economies in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. After studying the common challenges and characteristics of educational systems in change it would be helpful to study the transition process of a particular country. This section has as its purpose to illustrate some of the issues discussed in the paper. The case study's aim is to exemplify some important challenges, issues, and influence of the past on priorities using one country's experience.

I chose Poland as the country to be in the focus of this paper for several reasons. First, it is considered by some researchers to have one of the most advanced educational and economic systems after transition in Central and Eastern Europe along with Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, and Romania. This point is debated by others, who still consider the leftover problems after the change to be the ones having the most importance. I will address both points of view later in the paper.

The economic stability of the country allows it to implement the long-term reforms. Ten years after being one of the first countries to start the economic transition and launching a determined program of economic transformation, Poland has established itself as one of the most flourishing transition economies. Thus, the adjustment of education to the needs of market economy is superior to other countries of the region. Unlike some other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Poland did not suffer a mid-course depression, its currency has not been subject to attacks, and the economy slowed down only moderately after the crisis in

August 1998. As a result, over the last years inflation has declined and living standards have improved.

The second reason for taking a closer look at Poland's system of education was the fact that Poland was one of the few countries in Eastern Europe, which relatively successfully resisted the indoctrination of Communist ideology and the use of schools as primary tools for doing that. The country has an extensive history of opposition that makes it a great case study. My interest is in how much this comparative alienation of Poland at that time and it having a deeply religious community influenced its later success in transformation. Poland among the countries of Eastern Europe displays the greatest level of ethnic and religious homogeneity, having only small minorities. Thus, it avoided some of the most difficult challenges that other CEE countries face in transforming their educational system.

The paper will consist of three major parts. The first one will focus on the past of Poland's educational system and the values and philosophies behind education. The second will deal with the reform, which took place in education starting with Poland's independence. The third will deal with some of the early results of the reform in Polish system of education and further challenges that it faces.

Poland's Education before Transition

Red Army's success in WWII, gave the Soviet Union the opportunity of transforming one more country according to the communist model. Thus, with Soviet Union's "liberation" began a new era in Poland's existence. The communist-dominated government was installed in 1945. During the next seven years, Poland became a socialist state. Industrially, Poland's development under Communism was similar to neighboring countries, with their underdevelopment of most service activities. But Poland differed in having a large private component in agricultural zone, more specifically many small family farms, some of which even being able to generate small income. Religion and private property were two things Polish people fought for and were not ready to give up.

As in other nations under communist control, education in Poland was heavily influenced by Soviet ideology and politics. That was reflected in education management structures. The Minister of Education was subordinated to the Central Committee of the Communist party, the school superintendent to the provincial Communist governor. The teacher was at the very end of this system. The schools favored passive and conformist behavior. Communist ideal influenced the structure, programs, courses, and values of the education. "Four decades of schooling based upon the message that society can function well only with state taking all initiatives and the Communist party possessing all wisdom have had an inevitable effect on the way Poles think and act" (Glenn, 1995, p. 118), although not as much as in other countries under the Communist influence. The regime was not able to deprive Poles of the religious education, as they did in other countries of the Union. Poles have never known active attacks on religious education. Anti-religious groups had very little

influence on Polish society. In the *Journal of Social Education*, sociologist Zbyszko Melosik in his article “Poland in 1990s: The Role of Education in Creating a Participatory Society”, comments on the role of education in Poland before its independence from Soviet ideology: “The chief aims of education and schooling were to disseminate communist or socialist ideals and indoctrinate the youth with the belief in the infallibility of Marx and the leaders of the Polish and Soviet Communist Parties...such education aimed to create a primitive “adapter”, homo sovieticus, who could adapt to all the demands of the communist ruling elite” (Melosik, 1991, p. 191). This point of view, although correct in its factual description, when compared to situation in some other countries of the region, seems exaggerated.

The National Report on the Development of Education in Poland prepared by the Ministry of National Education in 2001, says:

“The school education system existing in Poland was characterized by extremely far-going centralization. Strategies and policy for the development of education were designed by the authorities of the communist party. All other...issues were however decided by the Minister of National Education. The powers of the latter covered issues concerning:

- curricula,
- textbooks and other teaching aids admitted for use in school,
- rules for the functioning of all types of schools,
- organization of the school network,

- classification of occupations and specializations in which education in vocational schools was provided,

- rules for awarding titles and diplomas attesting to vocational qualifications,

- rules for organizing and setting examinations (Wisnevski, 2001, p. 4).

Heads of educational authorities at regional levels carried out numerous inspections in all types of schools. The key activity of such a person - *kurator* was to insure the application of the Act on the School Education System and the regulations of the Ministry. The teachers' unwillingness to fight against the external forces influencing their work, was initiated by the law of 1981, which transferred 80% of the state expenses on education to teacher salaries and gave guaranteed employment to all teachers, regardless of performance and quality of work. (Wisnewski, 2001, p. 34) Summing up the information above it is clear that: (1) The powers of the educational authorities were extensive, (2) The authority of the teachers was very limited, and (3) School autonomy was very limited.

According to information offered by the Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange: Poland, this is in brief how Polish educational system looked up till 1999. Children started their education at the age of 7. Then for the next eight years they studied at primary school. After the first level of education young people could choose either a 4-year secondary school or a five-year technical school and then continue their education at universities or postgraduate schools and courses, or they could choose a 3-year vocational school and having been trained in a particular profession they could start working in a factory. However all students who after vocational school wanted to broaden their knowledge

still had a chance to continue their education in a 3-year complementary technical school and then at universities or postgraduate schools and courses.

Everybody was supposed to complete at least 7 (8) years of elementary education. Most schools were public, especially at the elementary level. The essential difference with the republics of Soviet Union was that there existed several private high schools owned by church and all universities in exception of a few theological universities were also public. School education was free of charge at every level although students had to pay for their school manuals, books, tools and clothes, unlike students in Soviet States, where all of the above was free of charge for students and university students received a monthly allowance and free housing.

Similar to Bulgaria and Romania, the only foreign language obligatory for everybody was Russian. Western languages were taught in high school and higher levels. Russian lessons were starting in fifth grade of elementary school and lasted up to the end of the high school, and were also continued at the university level. For apparent reasons there was a lack of interest in the language. Besides, a lot of material was presented in propaganda style although some classic literature was also read and analyzed.

Looking at the Polish system of education before its complete independence from the Soviet influence one can see the many features of it being different from the Soviet model, although the forced upon Russian language and propaganda literature were constant components of Polish education. The existence of church schools and theological universities was one of the biggest successes of Polish people at the time. "Many progressive Westerners felt scandalized by the alliance of the trade unionists, educational system and the Catholic

Church” (Goldfarb, 1989, p. 11). The repeated upheavals of the Solidarity movement in Poland were constant reminders that the Soviet opposition is not going to last.

Even the structure of the education differed greatly from the Soviet model, although an attempt was made to change that in the seventies. A big discussion started on a project of modification Polish educational system. The project was based on modification of elementary 8-year school and 4-year high school into 10 -year elementary school and 2 years of high schools. Discussion lasted until the end of seventies but it suddenly stopped, because Poland was in a big economical and political crisis and school reform was not a priority anymore. Besides the model of 10-year elementary school was based on Soviet school and the political situation made everything based on Soviet Union (still Brezhnev epoch) even officially less popular. Thus, the old system remained.

Although some important differences existed, the basis of the structure and decision-making was heavily influenced by the Soviet model. (1) The educational system was marked by centralized administration, strict supervision and control. “Any private educational initiative was met with suspicion from the side of the communist authorities, and the existing legal regulations left only a very narrow margin for educational activities not administered by the State” (Glenn, 1995, p. 117). (2) The main effort of the regime, was as in other socialist states, to achieve ideological hegemony. (3) The Communist party cell existed in each school and had as its aim to ensure the rigidity of the “verification” process, during which the teachers were supposed to show how they were meeting the state’s requirements on excluding religion and including the Party program in their teaching, although the reality of the latter was far less rigid.

Charles Glenn in his book *Educational Freedom in Eastern Europe* talks of the “hidden curriculum” in capitalist countries becoming more important than the teaching of subjects and needed skills. He mentions the absence of “hidden curriculum” in socialist states, since the political mission of schools was obvious and not hidden. But, with all of the drawbacks of that, as the “political goal could be promoted without apology” (Glenn, 1995, p. 119), it made it easier to detect and resist them, as people of Poland finally did. Moreover, what makes Poland exceptional was that this country was a pioneer in resisting the Soviet doctrine and ideological imposition. The reforms in Poland started as early as the 1970s.

Polish Society before Independence

The change of educational system of Poland did not have as its start September of 1999, when the structure of the educational system of changed. The attempts of the reform started much earlier, but decline in economy and the uncertainties in the labor market situation made a comprehensive and organized educational reform impossible at that time. Educational system continually under the economical, political, and social reform tried to adapt to the existing situation, but the problems of the former regime and practices, stopped it from providing the necessary qualifications and specializations in demand.

Although Poland remained within the communist political structure through the 1980s, open social conflicts occurred at intervals throughout the period. Protests in 1980 generated the Solidarity (Solidarnosc) labor movement, which forced essential compromise in the socialist system. “The Solidarity Movements attempts of 1956, 1968 ad 1980-1981 had clearly shown that Poland was most likely Central Eastern European country to undermine the unity of the Communist bloc, the first one to try to break from the stifling control by the

Big Brother and abandon the ideology which the nation saw as an unwanted imposition from the outside” (Tomiak, 2000, pp. 132-133).

Polish people managed to keep their public life and traditions fairly free of opposition. A great example of that could be the visit of John Paul II as early as summer of 1979, described by Goldfarb (1989). The Polish society alienated itself from authorities during the visit. The strategy of the Solidarity movement at the time, was to act as though Poland was free. The people engaged in opposition activity openly, spoke and wrote without regard to censorship. The movement constantly reminded people of an alternative life outside totalitarian order. Polish people were well prepared for the June of 1989, when the opportunity for the complete transformation arrived. However, the sudden introduction of political pluralism, produced several political parties led by inexperienced politicians expecting instantaneous results: “As many as 29 parties entered the first post-Communist government...” (Tomiak, 2000, p. 134).

Reform in Education

The first attempts to reform the educational system of the country started as early as 1970s when Edward Gierek came to power. Along with starting development programs in every domain, he asked for a report on education from groups of experts. Although the report came up with priorities that demanded big structural changes to equalize access to higher education, the Government did not agree with them and instituted a reform plan centered around simply restructuring curricula and increasing length of compulsory education to 10 years. Poland had the privilege to live and educate by relatively mild Marxist–Leninist standards. Birzea (1994, pp. 60-61), talks of Poland’s fairly liberal official curricula, along

with which an alternative curricula was present. “This hidden curriculum was the result of a tacit agreement between the Party, the Catholic Church and liberal intellectuals” (Birzea, 1994, p. 61) Solidarity movement was so strong, and had such a big number of educators in it, that it even published an underground journal “Educacia I Dialog”, which supported alternative educational literature. Such procedures, unthinkable in the Soviet Union, represent the main reasons for Poland’s success nowadays. It presented the Poles with alternative views and possibilities of living according to their traditions as much as it was attainable. January 1987, brought another request for a new report on the situation of the educational system in Poland, which was completed in 1989 and was already presented to a post-communist government. It gave the educational system the place of the primary importance in the transition and was an important start in transformation.

Starting with the collapse of Soviet Union, Polish society started to undergo profound transformation in reshaping its political, economic, social and cultural way of life. After half a century of communist ruling, it attempted to establish democracy and bring into value the advantages of market economy and promote further privatization. The biggest challenge of it all was to achieve the desired change without sacrificing national characteristics and traditions. I consider Poland’s biggest achievement to be the changed attitude of people, their newfound self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and innovativeness. This is a big step forward for the country, which was culturally dependent, highly centralized, and under an authoritarian regime. Comparing to some other countries formerly under the Communist ruling, where people after being directed for many years have a hard time realizing the advantages of becoming independent and not controlled, Polish people have been successful in changing

their perceptions and way of thinking. The book compiled by OECD *Reviews of National Policies For Education: Poland*, says that Poland was one of very few countries which was able to make a revolution through peaceful means and quick action: “Poland has won much international respect and support for its achievements, as it comes to grips with the challenges of transition. Since the transfer of political power in 1989, successive governments have been promoting many changes with a sense of urgency” (OECD, 1996, p. 67). According to IBE, Country profiles: Poland, serious efforts to reform the educational system were initiated by the Ministry of National Education in 1989. In 1990, the Ministry of education created a document entitled “ Educational Priorities in Poland”, which outlined the priorities that shaped the future of the reform. Birzea (1994, p. 62) outlines the priorities as follows: abolishing the State monopoly of education, changing curricula and books, modernizing teacher-training.

Even before 1989, Poland was the communist European country with a private Catholic university and around 10 Catholic high schools, thus the question of State monopoly was not as severe as in other countries of the region. Since 1989 the growth of private schools in Poland was impressive. The most interesting fact is that these schools were equally financed by the State (50%) and parents (50%), different from Hungary, where 30 % come from parents and 70% from the State (World Bank Report, Laport Bruno, 1997, p. 24). This also illustrates the difference in degree of public involvement in education and the extent to which people see their power in making crucial decisions about the system. In response to changing political structures and ideologies, the curricula and textbooks have been adapted to the new market economy world, with skill centered learning , as well as

teacher training, focusing on preparing faculty for teaching subjects lacking before in Polish education, such as various foreign languages.

But, during the first years only some changes were introduced. The comprehensive educational reform including vocational and continuing education began in 1997. The first stage of it was in September of 1999, with the introduction of the new school structure and new core curricula developed independently by schools, however with an option of choosing curricula proposed and approved by the Ministry, which is an amazing step away from the centralized and controlled system of the past. The government program of 1994 included a statement on the State's attempt to raise a better-educated people. The objectives of the program were outlined by the government as follows:

- *to expand the scope of education at the secondary and tertiary levels;
- *to increase the proportion of graduates from primary schools who continue their education at the secondary level and to increase the number of students at tertiary level;
- *to stimulate the economic bodies' interest in investing in human resources;
- *to reduce the emigration of educated and creative staff and to increase their access to national research and academic institutions (Wisnewski, 2001, pp. 25-38).

Expanding the scope of education came to be the main goal of the reform as the market demanded people with new skills and new knowledge. The process and values of education had to change as well, since the school was no longer centered around communist teachings, but a person with critical thinking, able to make independent decisions and do his/her work according to high standards of the market economy world.

As the labor market in the period of 1989-1993 was characterized by significant decline in demand for the manpower, it resulted in mass unemployment. International Bureau of Education (IBE, Country Profiles: Poland, p. 3) statistics presents the following numbers: During 1990-1993, the number of employees decreased from 17, 754,000 to 15, 118,000. This situation worsened over the next couple of years, though never reaching the level of unemployment of the Soviet Union countries in the transition period. Nevertheless, unemployment, a phenomenon unknown in the times of socialism appeared to be a problem, citizens of Poland were not prepared to deal with. But soon the radical economic reforms launched by the government worked. The inflation was curtailed and the Polish zloty soon became a convertible currency, privatization was initiated, fairly democratic elections took place, censorship was abolished and the media market was opened to free competition.

The people of Poland agreed on the necessity of the reform in education as well as on the idea that unlike economy education may not be treated with the same shock therapy, thus the changes were introduced gradually. The initial changes, the most urgent ones, were efforts of decentralization and the move away from Soviet Union as far as the curricula were concerned. They comprised the following (Wisnewski, 2001):

- adjusting curricula: eliminating elements of ideological indoctrination and biased view of history,
- changing the Status of Russian language in the school curricula,
- creating conditions for the gradual introduction of foreign languages

- organizing competitions for the posts of curators and head teachers in all provinces, with local authorities sitting on competition committees,

- confirming the possibility for private persons, institutions and associations to establish and run schools, and for education in public schools to be provided on the basis of the so-called independently developed curricula.

I consider these initial changes to be the most important ones, as they eliminated Soviet ideology, gave possibility for privatization, and decentralized the educational authority.

Philosophy of Education

The main debate that was in the center of the transition of the educational system in Poland was on the changing philosophy of education. Vice minister of education in the years of 1989-1993, Anna Radziwill, in her book *On School, Education and Politics* says:

“This is a fundamental change of the whole philosophy of the school. I think the awareness that the school should aim at personalism – where the human being, the pupil as a person and the teacher as a person, treated as an individual and a community member, give meaning to the whole school system – is the key achievement of the breakthrough in thinking about school brought by the Solidarity.”

Poland is building its educational system on the blend of two ideologies, which reflect its beliefs and traditions: neo-liberalism and Christian democracy. The most important document written during the time of transition of education in Poland, was the Act on School Education System of 1991, which prolonged the discussion of the values of the Polish

education system. Finally it defined the education as a “common welfare of the whole society”. It did not introduce any fundamental changes in the structure of the school system, but it stressed the traditions of Christian values and role of social participation in educational policies’ decisions. The act also provided for the right to learn and receive care, family’s educational role, right to establish private schools, adaptation of content, methods and organization of education, the right to learn at all types of schools for disabled people, general access to secondary schools, elimination of difference in quality of education between rural and urban centers, and finally adjustment of the curricula to labor market requirements.

The following reforms were the greatest achievements of the Poland’s transition to a new educational system. I consider them to be crucial in Poland’s attempt to open borders, return to their traditions, move away from the traces the communist influence left in education, and expand educational opportunities.

1. The establishment of foreign language teacher training colleges in the early 1990s. The promotion of foreign language teaching was the consequence of the Ministry’s long-term goal: 100% of citizens being fluent in one foreign language and 60 % in two, according to the Ministry’s report of 2001.
2. Introduction of religion in the curriculum. 90% of Poles identify themselves as Catholic, so the introduction of religion as an optional subject in schools did not bring any religious discrimination of people of other religions (at least, nothing has been recorded so far).

3. Changes in vocational education. Economic changes brought on the necessity of big transformations in vocational education in Poland. Enterprises previously financing vocational education, due to economic crisis had no funds to support it any longer. Thus, the financing of vocational education became the State's responsibility. Although the funds were limited, the change brought some positive adjustments to the present day situation: foreign languages, computer science, and economics classes were introduced into the core curriculum of vocational schools.

4. The appearance of private schools. There is no longer monopoly of State in education. A multitude of private schools and higher education institutions has appeared in Poland over the last several years. Higher education institutions were given institutional autonomy and academic freedom as well. Competition and innovative methods used by private schools seem to be a good incentive for public schools.

5. New type of school. A four-year technical lyceum is a new type of school in Poland. 35 % of its program is devoted to general education and 65% to the specialized section as chosen by a student, according to the Ministry report.

6. The changes in the core curricula. These changes were not possible right from the start, for the reasons of drastic budget cuts. Before the transition, schools implemented curricula and timetables designed centrally. The core curricula defined the knowledge and skills that pupils should be equipped with, the outcomes of the teaching process, in other words. Nowadays, the schools are given a lot of independence, as they can design their own curricula, although they can use the Ministry of Education designed ones and adapt them to the conditions of a given school.

7. Financing. Obviously one of the biggest change for Poland's educational system was the financing of schools. . Local governments finance elementary schools and junior high schools, high schools are financed by provincial governments, and higher education still remains within nation-wide budget expenditures Since the first of January, 1996, the primary schools are financed and administrated by *gminas* (lowest local government level) plus the States budget subsidy, which is calculated according to the number of students in schools and types of schools (village schools being privileged). Private schools receive grants from the State, which constitute 50 % of current expenditures on public institutions. Private primary schools receive grants from local authorities

8. Testing. With giving schools independence and control over the core curricula, the State created common and centrally designed compulsory tests and examinations (entrance and graduation) for all levels.

9. Teacher qualifications. The reform had as one of its main aims to make a change in teacher training and promotion. One of the other objectives of educational reform in Poland was also to eliminate poor performance by motivating teachers to work harder and improve their qualifications. The reform proposed six categories of teachers, from intern teachers through teachers on contracts to professors. The present teacher salary system is based on the number of years of experience that a teacher has.

10. Structure. One of the important changes included the change of structure of Polish system of education. Compulsory education in Poland has been increased from eight to nine years.

Global Village, Cooperation across Borders in Education and Industry Project

describe the new structure of Poland's educational system as follows. Elementary education

is divided into six-year elementary schools (szkola podstawowa) and three-year intermediary schools (gimnazjum), for which new syllabuses have been drawn up. Secondary education is received at three-year lyceums or two-year vocational schools (szkola zawodowa). After the first six years of school, all children are tested to determine their levels of knowledge and skills. The test serves not to stream children but to estimate further education needs. After six years of primary schools, 13-years olds enter a junior high school to learn traditional subjects such as mathematics, chemistry physics biology and geography. In addition, the aim of junior high schools is to develop students' capacity to think independently and to shape their interests and abilities. Junior high school ends with a pre-orientation test, which aims to help students to decide where to continue their education. The common educational path will end at the age of 16. Students will then decide whether to enter a 3-year high school, which will lead to a diploma and then to a university education, or to enroll in a 2-year vocational school.

Education reform was launched at the start of new school year. On September 1st, 1999 Premier Jerzy Buzek commented on the sweeping education reform launched: "This reform will dictate Poland's future position in the world. We have to make changes now if the economy is to be prosperous in 15 years' time". The reform was expected to ensure that students are better prepared for the various challenges of the modern, high-tech world.

Poland main strength of the reform, as I see it, was its success in making education a national priority and changing the relationship between educational institutions, people of Poland and the State.

Early Results and Debates

In this part of the paper I will summarize some of the early results of the reform and comment on the debates still going on among the policy makers in Poland. The discussion of the initial results of the reform in education is essential for the purposes of this chapter, as one of the reasons for Poland case study was to illustrate the significance of Poland's earlier experience and its influence on the priorities of the educational reform in the country.

Due to the lack of capacity of the earlier system in adapting to pace and goal of cultural, social and economic change in Poland, the reform in education became necessary. It aimed to do several things:

- *Transform the role of education.* In other words the role of education in Poland now is the teaching of skills and not the transformation of person.
- *Provide all people with equal opportunities and equal access to education.*
- *Adaptation of vocational education.*
- *Make the link between schools, families and local communities stronger.*

The clear advantages of the relative success of the reform (when compared to other countries of the region), were due to the its immediate implementation, fast alterations of textbooks, the change of structure, but most importantly to Poles being prepared and ready for them, as their history of opposition illustrates.

The first changes in education started almost immediately after Poland's successful breaking away from the influence of the Soviet Union.

With the reform of structure beginning so fast the book publishing companies were invaluable in providing fast publishing of the new books and alterations of the old ones in time for the new school year.

The change of the structure of the educational system in Poland brought with itself clearer distinction of children and young people. It allowed for active and clear assessment of students at every level. The reform of the structure postponed the decisions about the specialization and made the adjustment of the teaching methods and curriculum to the specific needs of students easier.

Poland was very successful in overcoming the difficulties that the transition from the centralized and totalitarian system to the market economy and democracy. The recovery of the number of students enrolled happened amazingly fast compared to the struggles some other countries of the Central and Eastern Europe face, where unemployment led to the great decrease in enrollment. The Ministry Report of 2001 provides us with the following numbers:

In 1990 the number of students enrolled was 3943, 13, while in the year 1999 it was 1, 463, 303. Alina Matlakiewicz from Nicholas Copernicus University, in her article "The State and Changes of Higher Education in Poland in the 90s", also mentions a considerable increase in the number of students. This researcher gives two reasons for this phenomenon: a demographic boom and a greater percentage of high school graduates realizing higher education leads to better job opportunities. "...unemployment among this social group (people with higher education diploma) remains at the level of 3, 5%" (Matlakiewicz, p. 2).

World Bank Educational Statistics show that the rate of students of ages 19-24 rose from 12.8 % in 1990 to 38.2 % in 1999. With the amelioration of economy and appearance of privatization laws the number of private schools increased. Nowadays not only religious schools are independent from the State. The number of students enrolled in private schools increased from being 9,626 in 1990 to 413,781 in 1999.

Universities trying to adapt to the new world are broadening the offered programs. They propose "...weekend part-time studies, Licentiate (BA) courses, complementary MA studies, postgraduate and doctorate studies" (Matlakiewicz, p. 3). But although most researchers and foundations providing the statistics are very optimistic about the early results of the reform, some still feel that the educational system in Poland is far from democratic and evolved.

The main point of debate in Poland now seems to be about unequal opportunities of children and young people living in rural areas compared to the urban students. Equal educational opportunities was one of the most important cover areas of the reform in Poland, and one that obviously still needs a lot of work. One of the SOCO Project papers, written by Martha Zahorska and Elzbieta Putkiewicz in Vienna in 2000, under the name of *Rural Schools and 1999 Education Reform in Poland*, presents in itself case studies of six gminas, which included two urban and four rural schools. The research has as its motivation the great difference in educational outcomes between rural and urban students. The difference between these two groups in educational levels and aspirations, varies much and the low rural representation in higher education institutions concerns a lot of people in Poland. The main reason for this difference as the research concluded is in erroneous evaluations by the State,

which is concentrated on the number of the students enrolled and not on their success. Also, the streaming of the low grade students in rural schools into vocational education is great and this type of student is not getting any individual educational consulting, which would help this student move away from the family's background, motivations, and history and not repeat it.

David Fretwell and Antony Wheeler in their article "Poland: Secondary Education and Training" also present the alternative view that education in Poland, despite numerous innovations, has made far less progress than represented by other researchers and funds. The authors mention three issues which need to be further addressed, one among them also being that of rural and urban inequality. The other two are over-centralization and the issue of assessment and supervision.

Fretwell and Wheeler (2001, p. 9) consider educational policy making in Poland, despite its relatively successful attempt and decentralization, to be mainly the concern of the Ministry of Education and the teacher's unions. The authors consider the involvement of parents, pupils, social leaders and employers to be still very limited. These researchers still see a lot of burden of the past habits in the way students and teachers are assessed and supervised, noting that the goal of it is understood wrongly. Instead of assessment and supervision being a tool of guidance, it still remains, in authors' point of view a "control function" (Wheeler and Fretwell, 2001, p.9).

One other point of debate concerns costs of tuition in institutions of higher education in Poland. Universities are trying to initiate the process of complete financial autonomy and are fighting for the right of changing the tuition rules for all kinds of classes.

“Representatives of schools of higher education believe that by introducing tuition for studies they will be able to set it at any level they want” (Dabrowa-Szeffler and Wojcicka, 1997, CEP, p. 48). Public opinion is against this, as this would limit the opportunities for the poorer class to get a higher education. At present, only full-time course programs are free of charge to students who complete their studies in the allotted time period. In most institutions, full-time students must pay fees if they repeat a year because of academic failure. Extramural, evening, and correspondence students, as well as non-degree students, are charged fees for their studies. Private institutions charge fees for all forms of education.

Some other issues surfacing in documents and research papers on Poland’s education system is the limited time that the country had to train teachers and one of the most important points of today’s debate: changing goal of education. The Soviet model, which concentrated on forming a person and not responding to the needs of the economy, no longer is valid and universities at present are under pressure of meeting the needs of the labor market and professionalisation. Alina Matlakiewicz talks further on the topic:

“At Polish universities a dispute between wisdom and capability is going on. It is caused by the evolution of a university from the community model into the business enterprise model. At a traditional university, the educational aims were connected with wisdom, whereas in the contemporary model, oriented to professional training, those are focused on capability” (Matlakiewicz, p.1).

The different views about Poland’s success in transforming the education system of the country as seen by experts from Poland and Western countries are understandable. Experts from Poland see the present situation always linking it with the past, thus success

such as school specific curriculum seems as a great advancement. It represents for them great freedom they lacked in the past. Although the points of view of the policy makers and researchers on the development of Poland's educational system differ, the country remains to be one of very few Central and Eastern European countries, that was able to transform its educational system actively, dramatically and with little sacrifice.

Conclusion

This paper outlined the main events that led to the transition in education in Poland, main reforms and some results of the reforms undertaken.

Poland was a great example of accomplishments of a country of Central and Eastern Europe, which had better conditions for succeeding. Among other countries of the region it has the greatest degree of ethnic and religious homogeneity. Thus it avoided some very controversial issues for educational development in the region, which affect the content, language, and aims of education. Therefore, it was to be expected that the adaptation of the educational system to the needs of the market economy would be more advanced than in other CEE countries.

In the industrial sense Poland's development under the Soviet influence was analogous to other countries in the region, with some differences. The private property has always existed there and Polish people were used to *ownership*. Religion was another thing that was never taken from Poles. The stubborn independence of the Polish Catholic Church influenced the education and allowed for the existence of several church owned private schools, an occurrence unthinkable in Soviet states.

I consider Poland's transition in education to be remarkable and the changes introduced valuable. The debates over centralization, rural/urban education opportunities and supervision going on in the country are similar to the discussions present among American policy makers and researchers and are not signs of educational damage, but rather presence of alternative points of view and mapped out ways of further development.

The reform has shown only the initial results. The end of the reform is to be in the year 2006. Poland still faces numerous problems to overcome. The most important challenge, as I see it, is in learning to create a free country with the new notion of politics founded on ethical values and not on social and economic imposed ideology, because a true innovation must happen not only in the system and content of education, but in the minds of people.

CONCLUSION

The paper summarized the main misconceptions, challenges and problems that the educational systems in transition in Central and Eastern Europe face.

In 1989, the world was presented with an unprecedented and unexpected for many phenomenon. Communism, which influenced many countries for half a century and changed the history of several generations, vanished. Countries, formerly enduring communist regime have decided to transform their systems into their complete opposite.

Reforms in educational systems are common, but the complete transformation of educational institutions, challenging the very basic foundations on which they were built, along with transformation of all spheres of a person's life, presents great challenges and a fascinating experience. Eastern and Central Europe is a region of great diversity, underestimated during the Soviet influence. The impact of cultures, languages, religions, and histories of these countries finally has its say in creating new systems of thought. Observation of these countries' efforts in reforming or completely transforming their education, presents important lessons for educators around the world. This experience teaches important lessons of breaking away from the former regime and its traces in education, liberalizing education, making it country specific, and infusing it with cultural values and traditions.

The surfacing from Communism has signified the return to Europe for the countries in the focus of the paper. But, rejoining Europe after fifty years of being cut off from it, presents major obstacles, although the path to it is cleared now. At present the difference between the countries of the region discussed in the paper and the rest of Europe, is no longer

ideological or political, but in most cases it is economical. There was no great difficulty in returning to traditions and culture for these countries, as surprisingly the Communist experience only made people stronger in their desire to identify themselves as cultural beings. Alas, the economic gap remains one of the main difficulties in the way of successful reforms in education.

The important characteristic, which was in the focus of the paper, that should be taken into consideration very seriously while approaching educational reforms in these countries is regional diversity. It was present throughout the entire history of the region and does not apply only to languages, religion, and ethnicity. The region has always been an area of divisions and unifications. And although the culture of post-totalitarian transition has somewhat united countries in their diversity, as described in the paper, the perception of the region during the second half of the twentieth century as a homogenous unit, a “bloc” in a political and ideological sense can never be anything but a mistake.

The in-depth knowledge of issues concerning a particular system is often missing in the advice of foreign experts, who assess situation and make proposals on the basis of very short visits to the countries of the region. Understanding that creation of solutions in Slovenia requires an essentially different approach than, for example Moldova and that same solutions may not lead to the same outcomes in these countries is crucial in approaching reforms in the countries of the region. The development of competent and professional solution proposals should presuppose a thorough knowledge of the past and present of the educational system in a certain area, its culture, current political discourse, and financial potential.

If one wishes to define the future of the educational systems of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it is essential to begin with recognition of the specific conditions

of each individual country of the region. Recognition of this fact can lead to solutions designed specifically for each country's special situation and bring about national recovery of the education.

The main message country experts should promote when discussing educational reforms in Central and Eastern Europe, is that it is true that there are some common problems. They exist due to fifty years of common regime. Nevertheless, there are no common solutions to these problems. The diversity among the systems and even within them in some cases is too great. Thus, no assumptions about common regional policies should be made.

There are no common solutions and blindly copying elements of or whole systems from the West, is an unlikely road to success for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Western systems had the possibility of creating their educational systems over time, organically developing each element appropriate for their own cultures and traditions. I do not lessen the values of wanting to reach a chosen ideal, but the road to it cannot be the same, since the departure point is different.

The importance of such departure points and their variety in the region, previously seen as one unit cannot be underestimated. The histories of the communist oppression are an essential part in consideration of the possible solutions and the extent of those. The various degrees of ideological oppression left diverse legacies, which lead now to a variety of challenges and priorities of each country's educational system. Concepts of the past influence the stages, principles, priorities, and visions leading educational reforms in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Various opinions, theories, and results relating to educational reforms in the countries of the region unavoidably present misconceptions about the region, but also the beginning of a deeper knowledge of the issue of post-totalitarian transition in education in Central and Eastern Europe, which ultimately can be reached only by detailed analysis of each country.

Poland is a logical point of discovery, due to its advanced stage in the reform. The country's experience illustrates the best the main argument of the paper about different starting points and public awareness during communist times, influencing the speed and modes of the reforms. Strong traditions of resistance, culture, independent public life are all factors in Poland's advanced stage. It also illustrates the success of reforms in a country devoid of minorities, thus avoiding major challenges other countries face.

Although the histories and situation of educational systems of Central and Eastern Europe are very different from those in North America, they face sometimes the exact same problems of school choice, values and main goals behind education, and its dependence on the ruling dominant ideology. In his controversial book "Educational Freedom in Eastern Europe" Charles Glenn talks of the dangers of using schooling as a State power, in an effort to remold humanity, illustrating this with the history of Soviet education. He then makes a note that this situation is not foreign to North America. "Unfortunately, this ambition is not unknown in the United States, where interest groups have sought to manipulate the content of public schooling to advance their agendas" (Glenn, 1995, p. 14).

The post-communist transition does not mean the end of ideologies, but a mere change of one for another. The case of Central and Eastern Europe presents a good opportunity to draw interesting conclusions regarding the role of ideology in the new educational policies. On one hand, each country has a governing ideology, which is usually

some form of social democracy and nationalism. On the other hand, under the pressure of funds and organizations financing the reforms, new ideologies are emerging dealing with market economy principles.

Unfortunately, education cannot be independent of context in countries where poverty is below acceptable levels and those in power are not trusted by population. Education is seen as a miracle way of changing society and advancing democracy but there are limits to its capacity in reality. In order to have an active role, education must benefit from the situation where society is evolving on all levels. Thus, several countries of the Central and Eastern Europe are in the impossible situation of having to reform education, with political changes happening daily and economic crisis present.

Nevertheless, the future of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is fascinating as the development of various educational systems along with other changes may present important lessons for countries around the world.

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